

Civil War Book Review

Summer 2020

Article 11

Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy

William Nester

St. John's University, nesterw@stjohns.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Nester, William (2020) "Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 3 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.22.3.11

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol22/iss3/11>

Review

William Nester

Summer 2020

Tucker, Ann L. *Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020). 272 pp. · 6 × 9 · ISBN 9780813944289. \$45.00

If there is still a relatively under-researched dimension of America's Civil War, it is its relationship with foreign countries. In her book *Newest Born of Nations*, Ann Tucker, an assistant professor of History at the University of North Georgia, explores how the revolutions that erupted across Europe in 1848 later inspired southern political leaders and newspapers editors to either justify or condemn the Confederate rebellion. Europe's 1848 revolts influenced three groups of southerners. Liberal secessionists believed in white civil rights and democracy. Conservative secessionists were nationalists first who were leery of too much democracy. Unionists wanted to remain Americans and justified their own defiance of the Confederacy by citing the revolutionaries of 1776 as well as 1848.

An array of southern newspapers and journals regularly reported on foreign affairs and their impact on the United States and the South like *Debow's Review*, *New Orleans Picayune*, *Southern Recorder*, *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, *Charleston Mercury*, Knoxville's *Southern Citizen*, and many others. In May 1861, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* insisted that "the struggle for Nationality'...abroad is the identical struggle" of the Confederacy. In a classic example of projection. John Mason, a Virginia Congressman and Confederate diplomat, declared that: "The people of the North...have separated themselves from the people of the South, and the government they thus inaugurate will be to us the government of a foreign power. We shall stand to such powers as Italy to Austria, and Poland to Russia."

There were plenty of skeptics from very different perspectives but united in disparaging Europe's 1848 revolutionaries. John Calhoun, Sam Houston, and George Kendall questioned whether Europeans could actually achieve republicanism. The *Arkansas Gazette* warned its readers

that “the future happiness of this great nation...depends upon the stability of the Union...We plant a fresh dagger in the bosoms of the Mazzinis, the Garibaldis, and the Kossuths of Italy and Hungary.” Of course, just how many southerners found inspiration in Europe’s 1848 revolutions is impossible to say, but likely were few and far between. Another problem with this view is that the European governments crushed every revolt except in France whose revolutionaries first established a republic for a few years then in 1851 a constitutional imperium under Emperor Napoleon III.

The adulation many southern rebels felt for Europe’s revolutionaries was mostly unreciprocated. Countless European rebels celebrated America’s revolution and the Declaration of Independence’s ideals to justify their action, condemned the Confederate slavocracy, and rejoiced when they learned of President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Many secessionists cheered Giuseppe Garibaldi, the brilliant leading general for Italy’s unification. They were disillusioned to learn that Garibaldi hated slavery and nearly accepted Secretary of State William Seward’s offer to be a Union general. Franz Siegal, a German-born immigrant who did become a Union general, explained: “When I saw that the same great principles to whose defense I had devoted my life were at stake here, I did not hesitate to embrace the cause of the Union with all the power of my soul.” *Newest Born of Nations* provides an interesting, thought-provoking exploration of European revolutions and their impact on the American Civil War generation.

William Nester is a professor of Government and Politics at St. John’s University. His latest book is *The Old West’s First Power Couples: The Fremonts, the Custers, and Their Epic Quest for Manifest Destiny*.